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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP AND DRL

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM MU

SUBJECT: OMAN'S NEW HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TAKES SHAPE

REF: MUSCAT 795

Classified By: DCM L. Victor Hurtado for Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Oman's new Human Rights Commission will include members from a variety of government ministries, as well as representatives from business, labor, and private associations. The commission has been given a broad range of responsibilities and will report to Sultan Qaboos through the Majlis al-Dowla (State Council). The names of individuals members, yet to be released, should provide further indication of how serious this promising new body may be in promoting human rights in the Sultanate. End Summary.

Membership

¶2. (U) On December 2, Oman's Official Gazette published the full text of the law detailing the composition and functions of the Sultanate's new Human Right Commission, established via Royal Decree on November 15 (reftel). (Note: A translated copy of the law was sent by email to DRL office and the Oman desk at the Department. End Note.) According to the law, 14 appointed members -- to be named in a forthcoming royal decree -- will serve on the commission, including one member each from the following bodies: the Majlis al-Dowla (appointed upper house of the Majlis Oman), the Majlis al-Shura (elected lower house of the Majlis Oman), the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the General Federation of Trade Unions of the Sultanate of Oman. In addition, there will be three members from private associations (i.e., NGOs), one member from the legal profession, and one member representing each of the following six ministries: Foreign Affairs, Interior, Social Development, Justice, Manpower, and Civil Service. Commission members will serve three-year terms, which can be renewed.

Responsibilities

¶3. (U) The royal decree and implementing legislation specify the following responsibilities for the commission:

- Pursuing the protection of human rights and freedoms in Oman in accordance with Omani law and international conventions and treaties;
- Monitoring remarks by foreign governments, international organizations, and NGOs in the area of human rights in Oman in order to verify and respond to such remarks;
- Consulting with concerned authorities regarding human rights and freedoms and contributing to the drafting of reports on these issues;
- Monitoring any violations or infringements related to human rights and assisting in resolving them; and
- Proposing an annual plan which includes national mechanisms necessary to spread "a human rights culture," as well as

referring the plan to the Council of Ministers for approval and ensuring its proper implementation.

Administration

¶4. (U) The commission will have a General Secretariat headed by an appointed Secretary General responsible for implementing the decisions of the Commission and supervising its financial and administrative affairs. It will be funded from the general state budget and any other resources as approved by the Council of Ministers. The commission will convene four times a year or "as necessary," and will prepare an annual report submitted to the Sultan through the Chairman of the Majlis al-Dowla. This report will include information on the commission's activities, as well as recommendations within its area of jurisdiction.

Comment

¶5. (C) While heavy with government representation, the new human rights commission appears to have a promisingly broad mandate. The names of the appointed members, when released, will give a further indication of how serious and independent the commission may be in pursuing its responsibilities. In any event, having a focal point on human rights in Oman, a topic that is normally shied away from in public discussion, should at a minimum increase post's opportunities for dialogue and cooperation related to this important area. End Comment.

GRAPPO